DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 530 CG 009 935

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TITLE Career Education: Challenges for Counselors.
PUB DATE 28 Sep 74
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the All Ohio School Counselors Association (Columbus, Ohio, September 28, 1974); Best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Career Education; *Change Strategies; *Counseling Effectiveness; *Counselor Role; Elementary Secondary Education; Guidance Personnel; *School Community Relationship; Speeches; Vocational Development

ABSTRACT

The author contends that in the past counselors have put an undue emphasis on describing students by their characteristics with a relative lack of emphasis on understanding them through their behavioral accomplishments. Career education challenges all counselors to correct this imbalance because it is action-centered and experience-oriented. The author proposes that the action orientation of career education calls for more "action-oriented" counselors. It also encourages the use of classroom resource persons from the business-labor-industry-professional-government community, and makes career guidance the proper business of the entire school, community, home and family. He concludes with remarks regarding the new role counselors must accept if career education is to be a success. (Author/HMV)

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CAREER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES FOR COUNSELORS

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Introduction

The counselor is a key person in the career education concept. Thus, the future of career education will obviously be affected by the counseling and guidance movement. The degree to which counseling and guidance will be affected by career education is neither clear or obvious. It is the purpose of this paper to provide one view of possible challenges for counselor change posed by career education. It will, of course, be up to each counselor to decide whether to accept or reject these challenges. I pose them here because, in my opinion, they can no longer be ignored.

As background for this contention, I refer to two facts that became clear during the Summer of 1974 when I conducted 20 "mini-conferences" for leading career education practitioners from school districts throughout the United States. Each "mini-conference" consisted of from 10 to 15 persons nominated by their state coordinator of career education as representing the best K-12 career education programs in their state. In all, approximately 275 persons attended these mini-conferences. Two facts pertinent to this discussion became apparent. One was that, of persons nominated to attend these conferences, more came from a guidance background than from any other single professional specialty in Education. The second was that, when conference participants were

Remarks prepared for presentation at the All Ohio School Counselors Association, Columbus, Ohio. September 28, 1974. These remarks represent the personal opinion of the writer. They should, in no way, be interpreted as representing any formal, or informal, position of the United States Office of Education.

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asked to name factors currently acting to impede career education in the senior high school, counselors were among the most frequently mentioned "roadblocks" named. Both facts have implications that form the basis for the challenges I want to present here. The fact that they may appear to be contradictory simply adds to the challenge.

Before proceeding, let me state my own personal biases as clearly and as forcefully as possible. I believe career education is a vehicle that can be used to greatly strengthen the status of counselors, the effectiveness with which counselors function, and the personal satisfactions that can accrue to practicing school counselors throughout the nation.

As I have worked in career education, various positive potentials for change in counselor role and function have become more and more obvious to me. By relating them here, I hope to present a basis each counselor can use for deciding whether or not to become involved in career education.

The Significance of "work" in Career Education: Implications for Change in Counselor Role and Function

The concept of work is, in my opinion, central to conceptualization of the entire career education movement. This concept holds several key implications for change in counselor role and function. I am well aware of the negative connotations the word "work" holds for many counselors as well as for many others in our society at the present time. Thus, my first task must be one of presenting a definition of "work" that hopefully will foster more positive attitudes.

Thanks to my many critics, I have frequently revised the specific definition of work that I want to use in career education. My current definition is:

> "WORK is conscious effort, other than activities whose primary purpose is related to either coping or relaxation, aimed at producing socially acceptable benefits for oneself and/or for oneself and others."

The key words in that definition are:

--- "conscious" - which means that it is chosen by the individual, not forced on him or her involuntarily (as "labor" is)

--- "effort" - which means that some necessary degree of difficulty is involved

--- produce" - which means that some clear outcome is sought as a result of the effort being expended

--- "socially acceptable benefits" - which means that the outcome is one aimed at helping, rather than hurting, those who receive the results of the effort being expended

Several basic concepts are implied in this definition. First, this definition of "work" is not limited to the world of paid employment. On the contrary, it obviously includes work done as part of one's leisure time, the work of the volunteer, the full-time homemaker, and the student. Second, this definition of "work" allows for economic, sociological, and psychological reasons for working to exist singly or in some combination. Third, while in no way denying economic reasons for working, this definition extends beyond such reasons to include the basic human need of all human beings to accomplish - to do - to achieve something. To feel that someone needs him or her for something. To know that, because he or she lives, the works is, in some way

and to some degree, benefited.

The concept of "work", implied in this definition, is a very humanistic one indeed. As such, it is applicable to all persons, of all ages, in all settings - both within and outside of the formal educational system. Because the concept extends from the pre-school through the retirement years, it is truly developmental in nature. This leads logically to defining "career" as:

"CAREER is the totality of work one does in his or her lifetime."

That, to me, is what the word "career" means in the term "career education". You can see why I must insist that the word "work" is central to the basic meaning of career education. It must also be obvious why I reject a view of career education pictured as being concerned with "all of life".

Several direct implications for change in counselor role and function are immediately apparent to those who recognize the centrality of work in the conceptualization of career education. Perhaps the most obvious is the degree to which the concept of work focus on accomplishment - on performance. The research literature of guidance has, for years, clearly demonstrated that the best prediction of future performance is past performance. Yet, in typical student appraisal programs, we often seem to have overlooked the operational significance of this common research finding. For example, we know the best single predictor of future grades is past grades. Yet, we continue to value various so-called "scholastic aptitude" tests more than we do grades. John Holland has demonstrated that the best predictor of future vocational activities is to ask students about their vocational interests, not measure them with interest inventories. This, too, has had little apparent effect on practices.

One of career education's tenets is that a person is, to a very large degree, a product of his or her past accomplishments and experiences. When we

ask an individual "Who are you?" the individual, if responding honestly and completely, tells us primarily about his or her past accomplishments. True, one often begins answering the question by describing his or her characteristics - name, age, physical characteristics, interests, and values. Such descriptions help us differentiate one person from another - i.e., they serve as "identifiers". They do not help us greatly in our attempts to understand the person. We predict a person's behavior, to a limited degree, by the way in which we combine data concerning the person's characteristics. We understand another person only through behaviorial expressions. I submit that the emphasis on accomplishments which the word "work" brings to career education holds great potential for counselor use in better understanding those persons counselors seek to serve.

The generalization I am making is that, in the past, we have put an undue emphasis on describing students by their characteristics and a relative lack of emphasis on understanding students through their behaviorial accomplishments. Career education holds great potential for helping counselors correct this imbalance.

Further, I submit that an emphasis on accomplishment, if carried out in a positive fashion, holds great potential for increasing meaningful student self-understanding. I think we have spent too much time telling students they are worthwhile and too little time letting students discover their own worth through their successful accomplishments. The key word here, of course, is "success". Our guidance literature is heavily burdened with normative approaches to increasing student self-understanding - with attempting to help students understand themselves through letting them know how they compare with others on some set of norms. The prime approach to self-understanding used

in career education is one of helping the student see what he or she has accomplished - not in seeing what he or she failed to accomplish. We emphasize success, not failure.

The generalization I am making is that, in the past, we have put an undue emphasis on normative comparisons and a relative lack of emphasis on demonstrated success in our attempts to increase student self-understanding. Career education challenges all counselors to correct this imbalance.

Finally, I submit that the emphasis on "work" found in career education holds great potential for helping individuals discover a personal meaning and meaningfulness of work in their total life style. Too often, in the past, counselors have spoken to students about "work" only in terms of the world of paid employment. Broader lifestyle implications, when discussed in conjunction with occupational decisions, have too often failed to consider either the desirability or, in many instances, the necessity many individuals have for work during part of their leisure time. This is particularly tragic for those individuals - and there are many - who find their roles in the world of paid employment so dehumanizing that it could not possibly be called "work". Instead, it must surely be regarded as "labor" - as primarily an involuntary set of activities the individual endures in order to gain enough economic benefits so as to find some happiness when away from his or her place of paid employment.

I submit that those who find themselves in such dehumanizing roles in the world of paid employment have no less a human need for work than does any other human being. A discussion of occupational goals devoid of discussion of the meaning and meaningfulness of work in the total lifestyle of the individual finding both their paid jobs and their total lifestyle largely lacking in

significant personal meaning. That, I am afraid, is what has happened much too often.

The genereralization I am making is that, in the past, we have put an undue emphasis on work only in the world of paid employment and a relative lack of emphasis on work as a positive part of an individual's leisure time. This, then, is a third imbalance that career education challenges counselors to correct.

The Significance of Action in Career Education: Implications for Change In Counselor Role and Function

Career education is action-centered and experience-oriented. If you have read the career education literature, you must be impressed by the emphasis on such expressions as "hands on", "work experience", "field trips", and "work study". Its emphasis on the project approach and on a general "learning-by-doing" emphasis has reminded many of the philosophy and the recommendations made many years ago by John Dewey. Insofar as this portion of career education is concerned, there is justification for the analogy.

This approach seems to have great appeal for the "now" generation of students. Rather than talking about the future in abstract terms, they are experiencing what it would be like if, as adults, they were to engage in various forms of work. Because of the implications such activities hold both for increasing student self-understanding and for decision making, it would seem worthwhile for counselors to consider becoming actively involved in helping students gain such experiences. Perhaps it is time, as one student said to me, for counselors to "spend less time giving me sympathy and more time giving me help".

If counselors were to accept this challenge, they would be spending

relatively less time collecting and filing standardized test score data and relatively more time in helping to design and use performance evaluation measures. They would spend less time talking with students about their need for part-time work and relatively more time in helping students find it. They would spend relatively less time helping students gain admission to college and relatively more time helping students decide what they plan to do after they leave college. That is, going to college would not, for most students, be a way of avoiding work but rather a way of preparing oneself for work. It would put a purpose in college attendance that, at present, is largely non-existent for many of our so-called "college bound" students.

I submit that the action orientation of career education calls for more "action-oriented" counselors. I further submit that, if counselors were to change in this direction, they would be perceived by students in a more positive light. In asking counselors to consider this kind of change, I am simply asking that we reflect on Maslow's needs structure and consider its implications for change in counselor behavior. If we think about this carefully, we may discover that we have spent relatively too much time in attempting to meet student self-actualization needs and relatively too little time meeting their prior needs for survival and for security.

The Significance of Collaboration in Career Education: Implications for Change In Counselor Role and Function

A third basic emphasis in career education is one of collaboration of efforts both within the formal educational system and among that system, the business-labor-industry-professional-government community, and the home and family structure. Much of the rationale and organizational structure of career education is based on this basic principle of collaborative - not merely

cooperative - effort. It is an emphasis that places high value on the total amount of help made available to any given individual and a relatively low value on assigning specific persons or organizations "credit" for such help.

This emphasis asks those teachers we call "academic" and those we call "vocational" to join together in making education, as preparation for work, both a prominent and a permanent goal of all who teach and of all who learn. It encourages a project approach to teaching that allow several teachers to be involved in a single project. It encourages the use of resource persons from the business-labor-industry-professional-government community in the classroom. It encourages the active involvement of parents in exposing youth to work values, to teaching good work habits, and in assisting youth in career decision making. It urges the classroom teacher to discuss the career implications of subject matter and to help students explore both the nature of various kinds of work and student aptitude for such work as regular classroom activities. In short, the career education movement has proclaimed that career guidance, in its fullest sense, is the proper business and concern of the entire school staff, of the business-labor-industry-professional-government community, and of the home and family. By doing so, career education has denied that career guidance is the exclusive responsibility of the counselor.

Counselors can, of course, choose to react to this emphasis in a variety of ways. Some may very well react negatively by asserting that career guidance is one of the unique roles of the professional counselor. Others may react by pointing to the obvious lack of both skill and understanding in career guidance present on the part of many who work in career education. Still other counselors may, when faced with a career education program, profess to be disinterested in career guidance and busy themselves with other kinds of

activities that they consider to more properly fit their role.

I submit that the most appropriate and productive role counselors could play is to enthusiastically endorse and enter into the collaborative efforts of the career education movement. I think counselors should be actively seeking to help teachers discover and infuse career implications of their subject matter into the teaching-learning process. I think counselors should be active participants in establishing and engaging into collaborative relationships with persons from the business-labor-industry-professional-government community. I think counselors should seek to actively involve parents in the career decision making process. In short, I think counselors will gain most if, instead of proclaiming career guidance as their "unique" role, they share their expertise in career guidance with all others involved in the career education program. Counselors will, in my opinion, gain more status and acceptance by sharing their expertise than by "hoarding" it.

This would, of course, demand that counselors give a higher priority to career guidance than many now do. If this happens, I submit that both students and parents will be happier with counselors than many now are. It would demand that counselors spend relatively less time in their offices and relatively more time working directly with teachers. If this happens, I submit that counselors would be better accepted as members of the school staff. It would demand that counselors spend relatively more time outside the school building interacting with both parents and with members of the business-labor-industry-professional-government community. If this happens, I submit that students will, in the long run, receive more and better career guidance than if the counselor tries to be the primary person helping students in this area. Finally, I submit that the need for elementary school counselors will become

clearer to school boards everywhere and that the number of such counselors will increase.

In short, I view career education's call for a collaborative emphasis as one holding high potential for increasing both the acceptability and the effectiveness of the professional counselor. I do not see negative results for the guidance movement if this direction is followed.

Concluding Remarks

This presentation has been purposely limited to challenges for future change that the career education movement poses for counselors. It seems mandatory to conclude by concentrating briefly on the appropriateness of such a limitation at this time.

To those who would prefer to wait, in discussing counselor role, until we know for sure whether or not the career education movement is going to survive, I say that, by the time that answer is known, it will be too late. I do not know if the career education movement can survive without the active involvement and commitment of the counseling and guidance profession. I do know that, if it survives without that involvement, it will be because it has been forced, by necessity, to find other kinds of personnel to do what we are now asking counselors to do. The long-run implications here are obvious.

To those who would try to proclaim that career guidance is part of the unique role and function of the counselors, I say they are living in the past and, professionally, are already dead. The days of educational isolationism are, in my opinion, gone forever. Relationships between education and the larger society become closer each year. We have reached a point when we must abandon the false assumption that the best way to ready students for the real world is to lock them up inside a school building and keep them away from

that world. It is, to me, not a question of whether or not the counselor must become involved in activities outside the school. Rather, the question is one of the kinds of activities in which the counselor will be involved. In my opinion, career education is the most viable option now available to school counselors.

To those counselors who may be inclined to claim the career education movement as their own, I say they have missed the basic point of collaboration inherent in the career education concept. True, viewed as a process consisting of career awareness, exploration, decision making, preparation, entry, and progression, career education and career guidance have much in common. When viewed as a collaborative program effort, they do not. Career development, like vocational education, is properly viewed as one programmatic component of career education. Career education is no more a simple extension of what, in the past, has been known as career development than it is of what has been known as vocational education.

To those who profess no interest in either career guidance or in career education, I say they should study carefully reactions of students, parents, and the general public to recent public opinion polls concerned with both counselors and with career education. In my opinion, these polls are clearly supporting both the career education movement and the counselor's deep involvement in that movement. While, of course, such polls are no suitable substitute for professional decisions made by counselors, it seems to me unwise to ignore them.

The career education movement, and the guidance movement, are both faced with crucial decisions regarding future directions. It seems to me that both have much to gain by joining forces. I hope that it seems that way to some of you.